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Bordigism

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In 1975 a pamphlet called *Un Monde sans argent: le communisme* (*A World Without Money: Communism*) was published in France. The authors argued for the immediate establishment of a moneyless, communist society:

Communism is the negation of capitalism. A movement produced by the development and very success of the capitalist mode of production which will end by overthrowing it and giving birth to a new kind of society. In place of a world based on the wages system and commodities must come into being a world where human activity will never again take the form of wage labour and where the products of such activity will no longer be objects of commerce...

Communism does not overthrow capital in order to restore commodities to their original state. Commodity exchange is a link and a progress. But it is a link between antagonistic parts. It will disappear without there being a return to barter, that primitive form of exchange. Mankind will no longer be divided into opposed groups or into enterprises. It will organise itself to plan and use its common heritage and to share out duties and enjoyments. The logic of sharing will replace the logic of exchange.

Money will disappear. It is not a neutral instrument of measurement. It is the commodity in which all other commodities are reflected.

Gold, silver and diamonds will no longer have any value apart from that arising from their own utility. Gold can be reserved, in accordance with Lenin's wish, for the construction of public lavatories¹.

This pamphlet was published by a group which had been partly influenced by the situationists, as could be seen by their typically situationist name of The Friends of the 4 Million Young Workers. Above all, however, the group had been influenced in their ideas on a 'world without money' by the later writings of Amadeo Bordiga.

¹ *Un Monde sans argent: le communisme* (Paris: Les Amis de 4 Millions de Jeunes Travailleurs, 1975) pp. 1 and 8.

Who was Amadeo Bordiga

Amadeo Bordiga (1889-1970) had been before the First World War an active and prominent member of the ‘intransigent’ wing of the Socialist Party of Italy (PSI). Bordiga and his comrades called themselves ‘intransigents’ because they opposed reformist trends within the PSI. Grappling with the problem of how to prevent a socialist party becoming reformist, Bordiga at first advocated expelling freemasons and other open reformists and the submission of the parliamentary group to the strict control of the party organisation outside parliament. Towards the end of the war he took this line of reasoning even further, arguing that, to avoid becoming reformist, the party should abstain from parliamentary activity altogether since it was seeking votes to get elected that obliged it to adapt itself to the reform-minded consciousness of the majority of workers. Eventually, Bordiga came to the view that the solution lay in the socialist party being an elite party, composed exclusively of socialists, which would not consider itself bound to take into account the views of the working class before taking action to try to achieve socialism. As this corresponded to a large extent to what Lenin and the Bolsheviks were saying (at least up until 1921), Bordiga became one of their partisans in the West.

He was present at the Second Congress of the Third International (Comintern) in Moscow in 1920, when Lenin convinced him to abandon his abstentionist position in the interests of founding a communist party in Italy. Thus when the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) was founded, as a split from the PSI, in January 1921 with Bordiga as its General Secretary, it did not advocate boycotting parliament and elections (although Bordiga himself always personally refused to be a parliamentary candidate). It did, however, remain thoroughly committed to the elitist conception of the party that Bordiga had developed.

For Bordiga the party was ‘the social brain’ of the working class whose task was not to seek majority support, but to concentrate on working for an armed insurrection, in the course of which it would seize power and then use it to abolish capitalism and impose a communist society by force. Bordiga identified ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ and dictatorship of the party and argued that establishing its own dictatorship should be the party’s immediate and direct aim.

This position was accepted by the majority of the members of the PCI of the time, but it was to bring them into conflict with the Comintern when in 1921 the latter adopted a new tactic: that of the ‘united front’ with reformist organisations to fight for reforms and even to form a ‘workers’ government’. Bordiga regarded this as a reversion to the failed tactics which the pre-war Social Democrats had adopted and which had led to them becoming reformist.

Out of a regard for discipline, Bordiga and his comrades (who became known as the ‘Italian Left’) accepted the Comintern decision but were in an increasingly difficult position. When Bordiga was arrested in February 1923 on a trumped-up charge by the new Mussolini government, he had to give up his post as General Secretary of the PCI but, on his acquittal later that year, he decided not to reclaim it, thus implicitly accepting that he was now an oppositionist. In 1924 the Left lost control of the PCI to a pro-Stalin group whose leader, Gramsci, became the Party’s General Secretary in June. This loss of control was confirmed at the third Congress of the PCI, held in exile in Lyons in January 1926, at which the ‘theses’ drawn up by Bordiga and presented by the Left were rejected and those of the Stalinist leadership accepted². At the end of 1926 Bordiga was again arrested by Mussolini and sent to

² For this period of Bordiga’s political activity, see Andreina De Clementi, *Amadeo Bordiga* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971). In English there is Earlene Craver, ‘The Rediscovery of Amadeo Bordiga’, *Survey* XX

prison for three years. He was formally expelled from the PCI in 1930 for 'Trotskyism'. On his release from prison he dropped out of all political activity until the fall of Mussolini in 1943.

The Italian Left, however, was not just a one-man show. In 1928 its members in exile in France and Belgium formed themselves into the 'Left Fraction of the Communist Party of Italy', which became in 1935 the 'Italian Fraction of the Communist Left'. This change of name was a reflection of the Italian Left's view that the PCI and the other Communist Parties had now become 'counter-revolutionary'. The 'Bordighists', as they became known, with their theory of the elite nature of the party and their opposition to any form of 'frontism', earned themselves the reputation in the 1930s of being a super-Leninist sect.

During this period they were not of any particular interest to our theme of non-market socialism, since their views on post-capitalist society were the same as those of other Bolshevik groups: a period of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (to be exercised by the party) during which money, wages, markets and other capitalist economic categories would be gradually phased out, ending in the establishment of an international, moneyless, marketless society in the distant future. As a matter of fact, they – like the Trotskyists – held that Russia at this time was a degenerate, or degenerating, 'Workers' State' rather than state capitalism. The Italian Left eventually came in the 1940s to recognise that Russia was state capitalist but those who argued this in the 1930s had to leave the group³. With the fall of Mussolini in 1943, the Italian Left reemerged in Italy itself, as the 'Internationalist Communist Party' (PCIInt) which succeeded in attracting a wider audience than 'Left Communist' groups have normally done. Bordiga himself also became politically active again.

Generally speaking, too much importance should not be attached to individuals, but the fact is that Bordiga's reputation (founder-member and first General Secretary of the PCI, and member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern who had met, and argued with, Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Stalin and others) meant that his views carried more weight than others and, in relation to our theme of non-market socialism, it so happened that he put particular emphasis on the non-commercial nature of socialism in contrast to the commercial, buying and selling nature of capitalism. He frequently described capitalist society as a 'sewer' because of the effect it had on human behaviour, and it was clearly a gut reaction against capitalism's commercialism that was behind his political commitment.

Towards the end of the 1940s, as the wave of immediate post-war social unrest died down and the Italian Left returned to being a small sect, Bordiga came to argue that the period was no longer revolutionary and that all that revolutionaries could do in the circumstances was to preserve the revolutionary theory intact until the next revolutionary period came around. He thus set out consciously to 'restore', as he put

(spring/summer 1974). Otherwise Bordiga is just a footnote reference in the many books on Gramsci. See also 'Bordiga and the Idea of Socialism', *Socialist Standard*, February 1982, and 'Notes on Trotsky, Pannekoek and Bordiga', in Jean Barrot and Francois Martin, *Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1974) pp. 119-31. [Antagonism note: See Note on Pannekoek and Bordiga in the revised 1997 edition of "Eclipse...", published by Antagonism Press, BM Makhno, London WC1N 3XX]

³ *Bilan*, the monthly theoretical bulletin of the Italian Left during the period 1933-8, continually referred to Russia as 'a degenerate Workers' State'. For a 'state capitalist' breakaway which occurred in 1933, see *La Gauche communiste d'Italie* (Brussels: International Communist Current, 1983) p. 84. This pamphlet, based on a university thesis by one of the Belgian members of the ICC, is a good and generally objective history of the Italian Left. [Antagonism note: Now published by the ICC in English as *The Italian Communist Left 1926-45*]

it, revolutionary or communist or Marxist – he used all three terms interchangeably – theory. This involved him in writing and speaking on every aspect of theory – economics, the materialist conception of history, Russia, the national question and so on – but also on the nature of future society.

Before going on to examine in detail what Bordiga saw as being the essential features of future society, we need to complete our brief history of the Italian Left. Not all members of the PCI Int agreed with Bordiga's analysis of the period. Some wanted to continue agitating rather than to concentrate on theorising and in 1952 a split occurred, the followers of Bordiga leaving to form the 'International Communist Party'. The names of the fortnightly publications of the two rival organisations, *Battaglia comunista* (Communist Battle) and *Programma comunista* (Communist Programme), rather neatly summed up the difference in their respective points of view.

Bordiga argued that 'the communist programme' had been laid down by Marx and Engels in 1848 and that the role of contemporary communists was simply to preserve and propagate it intact. Except on the key issues of the party and democracy, Bordiga did in fact stick very closely to the views of Marx and Engels, including their dubious positions such as support for national liberation movements and for the idea expressed in the *Communist Manifesto* for a period of state capitalist development between the capture of political power by the working class and the final establishment of socialism⁴. His writings on economics and history were strictly Marxist, although those on politics reflected, even more forcefully than previously, his earlier views on the elitist nature and role of the party. He also brought out well the fact that, for Marx and Engels, socialist society involved the disappearance of money, buying and selling, wages, the market and all other exchange categories.

Bordiga pointed out that Marx had distinguished *three* stages after the capture of political power by the working class – transition stage, lower stage of communism, higher stage of communism – the last two of which were *both* to be non-commercial and non-Monetary:

The following schema can serve as a re-capitulation of our difficult subject...:

Transition stage: the proletariat has conquered power and must withdraw legal protection from the non-proletarian classes, precisely because it cannot 'abolish' them in one go. This means that the proletarian state controls an economy of which a part, a decreasing part it is true, knows commercial distribution and even forms of private disposition of the product and the means of production (whether these be concentrated or scattered). Economy not yet socialist, a transitional economy.

Lower stage of communism: or, if you want, socialism. Society has already come to *dispose* of the products in *general* and allocates them to its members by means of a plan for 'rationing'. Exchange and money have ceased to perform this function. It cannot be conceded to Stalin that simple exchange without money although still in accordance with the law of value could be a perspective for arriving at communism: on the contrary that would mean a sort of relapse into the barter system. The allocation of products starts rather from the centre and takes place without any equivalent in exchange. Example: when a malaria epidemic breaks out, quinine is distributed free in the area concerned, but in the proportion of a single

⁴ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. VI (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976) pp. 504-5.

tube per inhabitant.

In this stage, apart from the obligation to work continuing, the recording of the labour time supplied and the certificate attesting this are necessary, i.e. the famous labour voucher so much discussed for a hundred years. The voucher cannot be accumulated and any attempt to do so will involve the loss of a given amount of labour without restitution of any equivalent. The law of value is buried (Engels: society no longer attributes a 'value' to products).

Higher stage of communism which can also without hesitation be called full socialism. The productivity of labour has become such that neither constraint nor rationing are any longer necessary (except for pathological cases) as a means of avoiding the waste of products and human energy. Freedom for all to take for consumption. Example: the pharmacies distribute quinine freely and without restriction⁵

In other words, for Bordiga, both stages of socialist or communist society (sometimes distinguished as 'socialism' and 'communism') were characterised by the absence of money, the market, and so on, the difference between them being that in the first stage labour-time vouchers would be used to allocate goods to people, while in full socialism this could be abandoned in favour of full free access. This view distinguished Bordiga from other Leninists, and especially the Trotskyists, who tended (and still tend) to telescope the first two stages and so have money and the other exchange categories surviving into 'socialism'. Bordiga, as we shall see in the next section, would have none of this. No society in which money, buying and selling and the rest survived could be regarded as either socialist or communist; these exchange categories would die out before the socialist rather than the communist stage was reached.

Bordiga's 'Description of Communism'

Since Bordiga's writings on the nature of future society are relatively unknown in the English language, in this section I shall summarise them using extensive quotations⁶.

Abolition of Property

Socialism, said Bordiga, involved:

the negation of all property, or of *every subject of property* (private individual, associated individuals, state, nation, and even *society*) as of every object of property (the land ... the instruments of labour in general and the products of labour) (1958)⁷.

This was because property was necessarily 'private' in the sense of excluding some – the non-owners – from the benefit of what was owned, which was precisely what socialism wanted to end:

⁵ Amadeo Bordiga, 'Dialogue avec Staline' (1952), quoted in Jacques Camatte, *Bordiga et la passion du communisme: Textes essentiels de Bordiga et repères biographiques* (Paris: Spartacus, 1974) pp. 18-19 (emphases in the original).

⁶ Translated from the French, since French translations of Bordiga's writings are more readily available to me than the Italian originals. The date references after quotations refer to the Italian original, not the French translation.

⁷ Amadeo Bordiga, 'Le Programme révolutionnaire de la société communiste élimine toute forme de propriété de la terre, des installations productives et des produits du travail', in Camatte, 1974, p. 54 (emphases in the original).

Even from the point of view of terminology, property can only be conceived of as being *private*. For land this is more obvious in view of the fact that the flagrant aspect of this institution is a fence surrounding an estate which cannot be crossed without the consent of the owner. Private property means that the non-owner is *deprived* of the possibility of going into it. Whoever exercises this right, whether a private person or a group, the character of 'deprivation' remains for all the others (1958)⁸.

Hence:

to define communism by 'state property' is a nonsense because the idea of 'social property' is itself one: when society as a whole becomes the master of its conditions of existence because it has ceased to be torn by internal antagonisms, it is not at all 'social property' that comes into being but the abolition of property as a fact and so as an idea. For how is property to be defined if not by the exclusion of the other from the use and enjoyment of the object of property? When there is no longer anyone to be excluded there is no longer any property nor any possible property-owners, 'society' less than any other (1967-8)⁹.

The aim of socialism was to abolish property, not to change its form. Socialism was therefore to be defined not in terms of property in the means of production but in terms of social arrangements for using them:

When the socialist formulas are correct the word property is not to be found but possession, taking possession of the means of production, more precisely exercise of the control or management of the means of production, of which we still have to determine the precise subject (1958)¹⁰.

Bordiga went on to identify 'society' as this subject, so that he was in effect offering the following definition of socialism: a system of society based on the social control of the means of production.

Bordiga was adamant that socialism did not mean handing over control of the use – and thus effective ownership – of individual factories and other places of work either to the people working in them or to the people living in the area where those factories or places of work were situated. Commenting on a text by Marx, he wrote that socialist society was opposed:

to the attribution of the means of production (the land in our case) to particular social groups: fractions or particular classes of national society, local groups or enterprise groups, professional or trade union categories (1958)¹¹.

Furthermore:

The socialist programme insists that no branch of production should remain in the hands of one class only, *even if it is that of the producers*. Thus the land will not go to peasant associations, nor to the class of peasants,

⁸ Ibid, p. 54 (emphases in the original).

⁹ *Bilan d'une révolution*. Special Number of *Programme Communiste*, 40-41-42 (Paris: International Communist Party, October 1967-June 1968) p. 78.

¹⁰ Bordiga, 'Le Programme révolutionnaire', in Camatte, 1974, pp. 46-7

¹¹ Ibid, p. 60.

but to the whole of society (1958)¹².

Demands such as 'the factories for the workers', 'the mines for the miners' and other such schemes for 'workers' control' were not socialist demands, since a society in which they were realised would still be a property society in the sense that parts of the productive apparatus would be controlled by sections only of society to the exclusion of other sections. Socialism, Bordiga always insisted, meant the end of *all* sectional control over separate parts of the productive apparatus and the establishment of central social control over all the means of production.

So, for Bordiga, in a socialist society there would be no property whatsoever in the means of production, not just of individuals or of groups of individuals, but also not of groups of producers nor of local or national communities either. The means of production would not be owned at all, but would simply be there to be used by the human race for its survival and continuation in the best possible conditions.

Scientific Administration of Social Affairs

The abolition of property meant at the same time the abolition of social classes and of the state. With the abolition of property there would no longer be any group of people in a privileged position as a result of controlling land or instruments of production as their 'property', and there would be no need for any social organ of coercion to protect the property of the property holders and to uphold their rule in society. Social classes and the political state would eventually, in the course of a more or less long transition period, give way to 'the rational administration of human activities'. Thus Bordiga was able to write that 'if one wants to give a definition of the socialist economy, it is a stateless economy' (1956-7)¹³. He also wrote that, with the establishment of socialism, social organisation would have changed 'from a social system of constraint on men (which it has been since prehistory) into a unitary and scientifically constructed administration of things and natural forces' (1951) ¹⁴.

Bordiga saw the relationship between the party and the working class under capitalism as analogous with that of the brain to the other parts of a biological organism. Similarly, he envisaged the relationship between the scientifically organised central administration and the rest of socialist society in much the same terms. Indeed, Bordiga saw the administrative organ of socialist society as the direct descendant of the party in capitalist society:

When the international class war has been won and when states have died out, the party, which is born with the proletarian class and its doctrine, will not die out. In this distant time perhaps it will no longer be called a party, but it will live as the single organ, the 'brain' of a society freed from class forces (1956-7)¹⁵.

In the higher stage of communism, which will no longer know commodity production, nor money, nor nations, and which will also see the death of the state. ... The party. ... will still keep the role of depository and propagator of the social doctrine giving a general vision of the development of

¹² Ibid, p. 50 (emphasis in the original).

¹³ Amadeo Bordiga, *Structure économique et social de la Russie d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Editions de l'Oubli, 1975) p. 310.

¹⁴ Amadeo Bordiga, 'Dictature prolétarienne et parti de classe', in *Textes fondamentaux de la gauche communiste* in *La Révolution Communiste*, 3 (Brussels: 1984) pp. 67-8.

¹⁵ Bordiga, 1975, p. 95 (emphasis in the original).

the relations between human society and material nature (1951)¹⁶.

Thus the scientifically organised central administration in socialism would be, in a very real sense for Bordiga – who was a firm partisan of the view that human society is best understood as being a kind of organism – the ‘social brain’, a specialised social organ charged with managing the general affairs of society. Though it would be acting in the interest of the social organism as a whole, it would not be elected by the individual members of socialist society, any more than the human brain is elected by the individual cells of the human body.

Quite apart from accepting this biological metaphor, Bordiga took the view that it would not be appropriate in socialism to have recourse to elections to fill administrative posts, nor to take social decisions by ‘the counting of heads’. For him, administrative posts were best filled by those most capable of doing the job, not by the most popular; similarly, what was the best solution to a particular problem was something to be determined scientifically by experts in the field and not a matter of majority opinion to be settled by a vote.

What was important for Bordiga was not so much the personnel who would perform socialist administrative functions as the fact that there would need to be an administrative organ in socialism functioning as a social brain and that this organ would be organised on a ‘scientific’ rather than a ‘democratic’ basis.

Bordiga’s conception of socialism was ‘non-democratic’ rather than ‘undemocratic’. He was in effect defining socialism as not ‘the democratic social control of the means of production by and in the interest of society as a whole’, but simply as ‘the social control of the means of production in the interest of society as a whole’.

End of the Enterprise, the Market and Money

The establishment of socialism, as the central social control of all the means of production, meant the end of the enterprise which, as a productive unit or group of separate productive units controlled by a single separate capital, Bordiga identified as the key economic institution of capitalism. In fact, the enterprise was the specific form which property took in capitalist society; it was a form of property in the sense that it represented the control of parts of the social productive apparatus, and of the products of those parts, by sections only of society.

Where control over the means of production was divided amongst enterprises, the links that had to be made between productive units to enable them to function as a productive system could only be commercial. Enterprises were linked to one another by contracts to buy each other’s products. Thus the existence of enterprises implied the existence of buying and selling, of markets, of money and indeed of the whole commercial economy that was capitalism. Bordiga drew from his analysis of the enterprise-capitalist system the following conclusion:

Thus, the *socialist demand* proposes to overthrow not only *private property* law and economy, but at the same time the *market economy and the enterprise economy*.

It is only when society is moving beyond these three features of present-day economy – private ownership of the products, monetary market, organisation of production by enterprises – that it will be possible to say that it is going towards socialism (1948)¹⁷.

¹⁶ Bordiga, ‘Dictature prolétarienne’, in *Textes fondamentaux*, 1984, p. 70.

¹⁷ Extract from Amadeo Bordiga, *Propriété et Capital* (1948), in *Socialisme prolétarien contre socialisme*

And he added:

Capitalism exists as long as products are brought to the market or are in any case 'accounted' to the credit of the enterprise, considered as a distinct economic islet, even a very large one, while the remuneration of labour is debited to it (1948)¹⁸.

The establishment of socialism, by centralising control over all the means of production into the hands of society, meant the abolition not only of enterprises but also of buying and selling, of money, of wages, of the market and of all the other categories of an exchange economy. On this point Bordiga was very clear and very consistent over the years:

Modern commercial economy means monetary economy; thus the socialist anti-commercial demand involves equally the abolition of money as the means of exchange and also as the means of practical formation of capital (1948)¹⁹.

The capitalist mode of production... will have disappeared from the moment when there will no longer be any exchange values, nor commodities, i.e. when there will no longer be commercial exchange of consumer objects, nor any money (1952)²⁰.

Socialism... is the economy which no longer knows markets, circulation, money (1956-7)²¹.

The communist revolution is the death of commercialism (1958)²².

Socialism ... is the economy without exchange values (in the lower and higher stage) (1958)²³.

it will be a question of abolishing all exchange value and all production of values by labour (1958)²⁴.

By the same token, any society or scheme for social reconstruction which retained money, wages and the market could not be regarded as socialist:

where I find exchange, competition, capital, money, etc., there I have the right to say: non-socialist, bourgeois economic form (1959)²⁵.

a society based on wages paid in money is a non-communist, private property society, and let us add the corollary: even if there are no landowners

petit-bourgeois. Supplement to *Le Proletaire*, 312 (Paris: 1980) p. 24.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 24.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 22.

²⁰ Amadeo Bordiga, *Russie et révolution dans la théorie marxiste* (Paris: Spartacus, 1978) p. 140.

²¹ Bordiga, 1975, p. 315.

²² Bordiga, 'Le Programme révolutionnaire', in Camatte, 1974, p. 69.

²³ Amadeo Bordiga, 'Le Contenu original du programme communiste est l'abolition de l'individu comme sujet économique, détenteur de droits et acteur de l'histoire humaine', in Camatte, 1974, p. 104.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 105.

²⁵ Amadeo Bordiga, 'Commentaires des manuscrits de 1844', in Camatte, 1974, p. 134.

or capital-owners (1959)²⁶.

Wages are not the only positive economic phenomenon which allows us to state that the fall of the capitalist form has not yet been reached. We could express this same concept by saying that socialism does not yet exist when a *value* is attributed to *labour*; and it is the same when any other commodity is attributed an exchange value (1959)²⁷.

where there is money, there is neither socialism nor communism, as there isn't, and by a long way, in Russia (1959)²⁸.

Bordiga was thus a vigorous critic of all forms of so-called 'market socialism', whether this took the form of the state replacing private capitalists but retaining the enterprise form (as in Russia) or of various schemes for 'workers' control' of enterprises. Since criticism of Russia as non-socialist and state capitalist is now widely accepted, I will only quote Bordiga on why 'workers' control' of enterprises is not socialist:

The replacement of the boss and the bourgeois management by some 'factory council' elected as democratically as you want, in other words the replacement of the capitalist enterprise by an enterprise of a cooperative type, would not advance the necessary transformation of the economy by a single step. It is known that the attempts of workers' producer cooperatives in the last century, even if they did have the merit of showing that one could do without the social person of the capitalist, were a resounding failure because they were not able to stand up to the bourgeois competition. It would be no different if the competition took place no longer between bosses' enterprises and workers' cooperatives but between as many workers' cooperatives as there were enterprises. One of two things would happen: either the workers' cooperatives would try to operate other than as capitalist enterprises and as all the other conditions would remain bourgeois (links by the intermediary of the market) they would be swept aside; or, if they intended to survive, they would only be able to operate as capitalist enterprises with a money capital, wages, profits, a depreciation fund and capital investments, credit and interest etc. The competition between them would not be abolished, so neither would the system of commercial contracts, nor civil law and the state institution needed to uphold it (1967-8)²⁹.

Hence Bordiga's unambiguous conclusion:

A system of commercial exchange between free and autonomous enterprises such as might be supported by cooperators, syndicalists, libertarians, has no historical possibility nor any socialist character. It is even a step backward compared with numerous sectors already organised on a general scale in the bourgeois epoch, as required by technology and the complexity of social life. Socialism, or communism, means that the whole of society is a single association of producers and consumers (1952)³⁰.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 130.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 134 (emphases in the original).

²⁸ Amadeo Bordiga, 'Tables immuables de la théorie communiste de parti', in Camatte, 1974, p. 179.

²⁹ *Bilan d'une révolution*, 1967-8, pp. 75-6.

³⁰ Bordiga, 1978, p. 172.

Planned Production of Useful Things

In socialism, said Bordiga, with the disappearance of money and exchange value, all that would be produced would be useful things directly as such:

In Antiquity weavers produced the coat without producing the exchange value of the coat, adds Marx. And we, we add, absolutely sure: in communist society coats like everything else will be produced without producing exchange value (1958)³¹.

This contrasts strikingly with capitalism:

The bourgeois economy is a double economy. The bourgeois individual is not a man but a business. We want to destroy all businesses. We want to abolish the double economy in order to found the single economy which history already knew at the time when the caveman, with his hands as his only tool, went out to collect as many coconuts as he had companions in the cave (1948)³².

In other words, capitalism is concerned with profit-and-loss accounting, as its aim is to produce monetary profits, but socialism would simply be concerned with producing what people need.

Deciding what people need was, for Bordiga, one of the tasks of the central administration, which, having decided this in the light of what a scientific assessment of the facts had showed was needed to ensure the survival of the human race in the best conditions, would then have to arrange for the goods to satisfy the needs of humankind to be produced and made available for individual human beings to consume.

To do this, the central administration would manage all the means of production – the whole already-socialised productive system that socialism would inherit from capitalism – as a single unit, drawing up a plan to use them rationally to produce what it had been decided was needed. In this sense Bordiga was an advocate of ‘central planning’, but, for him, these plans would be drawn up exclusively in physical terms (and not in both physical and monetary terms as in state capitalist Russia and similar countries):

The basis of the future plans of the socialist economy ... is that they are established outside the commercial atmosphere and the monetary means. Lenin called this kind of plan ‘material plans’, one could even say ‘physical plans’ (1956-7)³³.

We affirm that the first socialist plan will be seen when its part expressed in the monetary unit is eliminated (1956-7)³⁴.

a really socialist accounting, in other words with projects referring to physical quantities of objects and of material forces without mentioning monetary equivalents (1956-7)³⁵.

³¹ Bordiga, ‘Le Contenu original du programme communiste’, in Camatte, 1974, p. 104.

³² Bordiga, ‘Socialisme prolétarien’, p. 24.

³³ Bordiga, 1975, p. 202.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 203.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 140.

Bukharin himself had said, quite correctly: 'at the moment that the means of production are socialised, the value form falls, and the only permitted accounting is that in nature (or physical)' (1956-7)³⁶.

The rational relationship between man and nature will be born from the moment when these accounts and these calculations concerning projects are no longer done in *money* but in physical and *human* magnitudes (1963)³⁷.

To those who said that such planning would be 'bureaucratic', Bordiga replied:

The socialist economy kills bureaucracy not because it is applied from the base or from the centre, but because it is the first economy which goes beyond the muck of monetary accounting and of the commercial budget system (1956-7)³⁸.

To illustrate what he meant about plans in socialism being drawn up exclusively in physical quantities, Bordiga used the building industry as an example:

One can give an idea of them by taking the example of a building project, accompanied by a forecast of 'needs for materials' and an idea of the number of work-days of an organised team, without making an 'estimate' but linking this work to the national plan concerning labour power, production and available goods (1956-7)³⁹.

In other words, plans in socialism would be drawn up as a list of the materials and labour needed to produce the various useful things that it had been decided were required to satisfy human needs.

Bordiga included labour, expressed as so many work-days, as one of the physical quantities in which the production plans of socialist society would be drawn up, but this was not the same as advocating the use of 'labour-time' as a general equivalent – a general measure of economic value – in place of money. Bordiga was in fact opposed to this. As far as he was concerned, it would not be necessary in socialism to evaluate all goods according to some universal unit of economic measurement; this was only necessary in societies where goods were exchanged, precisely as a means of establishing exchange ratios, but would not be needed in a society which only produced use-values directly as such:

If there is accumulation in socialism, it will take the form of an accumulation of objects, of materials useful to human needs, and these will have no need to appear alternatively as money, nor to undergo the application of a 'moneymeter' allowing them to be measured and compared according to a 'general equivalent'. Thus these objects will no longer be *commodities* and will no longer be defined except by their quantitative physical magnitude and by their qualitative nature, what the economists, and Marx also, for explanatory purposes, express by the term *use-value* (1956-7)⁴⁰.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 205.

³⁷ Amadeo Bordiga, 'La Légende du Piave', quoted in Camatte, 1974, p. 23 (emphases in the original).

³⁸ Bordiga, 1975, p. 340.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 140.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 191-2 (emphases in the original).

In post-bourgeois society, therefore, it will not be a question of 'measuring value by labour-time', as fools believe, but of finishing altogether with the measurement of value (1957)⁴¹.

In fact the whole revolutionary rebirth would collapse if each object were not to lose its character of being a commodity, and if labour were not to cease to be the measure of 'exchange value', another form which, at the same time as measurement by money, will have to die with the capitalist mode (1958)⁴².

So Bordiga saw production in socialist society as being organised in accordance with a plan, established by the central administration, and drawn up and executed exclusively in physical quantities of useful things without having recourse to any general equivalent, neither money nor labour-time.

Bordiga expected that in socialism the level of production would eventually become relatively stable (which would make planning a matter of routine). It might even drop as compared with capitalism:

It can be established that the rhythms of accumulation in socialism, measured in material quantities like tonnes of steel and kilowatts of energy, will be slow and little above that of the growth of the population. Compared with developed capitalist societies, the rational planning of consumption in quantity and quality and the abolition of the enormous mass of anti-social consumption (from the cigarette to aircraft carriers) will probably bring about a long period of fall in the indexes of production and thus, if we take up the old terms, a disinvestment and a disaccumulation (1956-7)⁴³.

Among the other matters which Bordiga saw the central administration of world socialism having to plan for, in the interest of the human race as an animal species, was a stable population and a more even spread of the population throughout the globe (disappearance of the distinction between town and countryside).

Free Distribution and Social Consumption

In socialism, said Bordiga, the central administration, acting on behalf of and in the best interest of human society as a whole, would not only decide what should be produced; it would also decide how what had been produced should be used. Those at workplace level who had produced goods would thus have no say as to how those goods should be used – since if they did, this would mean they would have a property right over them and then society would not be socialism – but would immediately make them available to society to use as it decided:

Society is immediately the owner of any product of labour supplied by each of its components, who have no right over what they have produced (1956-7)⁴⁴.

⁴¹ Amadeo Bordiga in *Il programma comunista*, 20 (1957), quoted in Jacques Camatte, *Capital et Gemeinwesen* (Paris: Spartacus, 1976) p. 213.

⁴² Bordiga, 'Le Programme révolutionnaire', in Camatte, 1974, pp. 70-1.

⁴³ Bordiga, 1975, p. 192.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 166.

The producers' associations of future society, whose membership will normally be renewed many times over the period of a man's life, will be associations having as their only aim the function, the act, the joy of producing. Not only to the extent that they will be following a *common rational plan* and to the extent that society will be *transformed into ONE producers' association* ..., but above all to the extent that these technical, non-economic groupings of producers will place the whole of their product at the disposal of society and of its central plan for consumption (1958)⁴⁵.

The central administration would then make available for individual consumption the consumer goods that had been placed by their producers (or rather by those engaged in the last stage of their production) at its disposal:

The administration, disposing at a given moment of all the goods that have been produced, retains when it comes to distribution the part which corresponds to general services and leaves the rest for daily individual consumption (1956-7)⁴⁶.

Only goods that could be consumed more or less rapidly would be made available for individual consumption; all other goods, including for instance houses, would remain social, to be used in accordance with the arrangements society would make for their use:

In socialist society only the immediately consumable part of the social product which is due to him will be made available to the producer (1956-7)⁴⁷.

we will speak about the worker having 'at his disposition' what he needs to provide for his immediate' consumption, immediate in the sense that consumer goods are not stocked but serve to cover in an extremely short period of time the whole range of his needs (1956-7)⁴⁸.

Thus individuals in socialism would not own consumer goods but would simply... consume them. As to the ideal of 'the family home', Bordiga regarded this as a stunted capitalist aspiration; indeed he denounced the family as a home-owning enterprise and capitalist consumption unit – a 'business' – which, like all other enterprises, would disappear in socialism, since all human beings, including all children, would have become members of a single human family. In socialism, houses would not be owned, but simply occupied by those who lived in them.

Naturally, there being no money, the goods which the central administration made available for individual consumption would be available for individuals to take freely without charge:

In the socialist form production remains social, and thus there is no ownership by anyone of the instruments of production, including the land and fixed installations. In this society there will be no individual appropriation even for consumption; distribution will be social and for social purposes.

⁴⁵ Bordiga, 'Le Contenu original du programme communiste', in Camatte, 1974, pp. 87-8 (emphases in the original).

⁴⁶ Bordiga, 1975, p. 318.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 294.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 291.

Social consumption differs from individual consumption in that the physical attribution of consumer goods does not take place through the intermediary of commercial purchase and with the monetary means.

When society satisfies all the needs of its members which do not conflict with the best interests of its development, *independently* of the greater or lesser contribution they have made to social labour, all personal property ceases and with it its measure, i.e. value and its symbol, money (1958)⁴⁹.

Bordiga preferred, as here, to speak of consumption being social in socialism rather than individual. This was because for him, although individuals would be free – at least in fully developed socialism – to choose which particular goods to take from the range of goods made available for individual consumption, they would not be free to choose which goods were made available. That would be a social decision made by the central administration in the light of what science indicated was best for the survival of the human race as an animal species. In other words, individuals would be consuming not so much for their own personal benefit as for the benefit of the whole species.

The point Bordiga was trying to make here was that not even in full socialism would individuals be able to consume whatever they might feel they wanted to; they would only be able to consume whatever society had decided should be available for individual consumption. Thus, to use an example Bordiga gave, people would only be able to smoke cigarettes if socialist society decided to produce them (which Bordiga thought unlikely); or people would only be able to visit the moon if socialist society decided to devote resources to provide facilities for all who wanted to go there.

Socialism?

The description of future society given here evidently earns Bordiga a place amongst those advocating a non-market society to replace capitalism, but, in view of the ‘non-democratic’ character of the administrative structure which he envisaged future society as having, the question of the extent to which it can be regarded as socialist must be seriously faced.

If democracy is simply defined as *political* democracy, that is, as a form of state, then clearly socialism, as a stateless society, would be non-democratic. But Bordiga was saying much more than this. He was saying that in socialism the mass of the people would not participate at all in the administration of social affairs; there would be no elections, nor would decisions be made by majority vote. On the contrary, all important social decisions would be made by a central administration which would be the direct successor of the vanguard party.

Bordiga does not seem to have realised the extent to which restricting decision-making to a minority within society, even to an elite of well-meaning social and scientific experts, conflicted with his definition of socialism as the abolition of property. For property, as Bordiga well realised, is a social fact, not a legal state; it exists when control over the use of some thing is *de facto* in the hands of some individual or some group to the exclusion of all other individuals and groups. Clearly, this situation would still apply in Bordiga’s socialism, with the elite central administration as the owners (*de facto* controllers) of all the means of production, since the power to decide how to use them would be exclusively theirs.

⁴⁹ Bordiga, ‘Le Contenu original du programme communiste’, in Camatte, 1974, pp. 79-80 (emphasis in the original).

If, however, we ignore this aspect of his views, then Bordiga can be said to have given a very clear description of socialist/communist society. In particular, he demonstrated with great clarity:

- (a) that it would not be based on state (or nationalised), or even on common (or social), property, but on the complete absence of any exclusive use-controlling rights over the means of production and their products; and
- (b) that it would involve the complete disappearance of buying and selling, of money and monetary calculation, of wages and of all other exchange categories, including enterprises as autonomous economic and accounting units.

The technocratic aspects of Bordiga's 'description of communism' were ignored by most of those influenced by him, including to a large extent the members of the group with which he was associated (the International Communist Party). The important point is that, thanks in part to the writings of Bordiga, the realisation that socialism is neither the state ownership nor the workers' control (through factory committees, workers' councils and the like) of enterprises engaged in profit-and-loss accounting (whether in money or labour-time) has been encouraged. Conversely, the idea that socialism must be a moneyless, wageless society has been, and still is, propagated by a number of groups and individuals influenced by Bordiga's views on this, particularly in France, Italy and Spain.

The fact that the idea of such a society as the only solution to the problems currently facing humankind in general, and wage- and salary-earners in particular, should have arisen, and be propagated, in these countries quite independently of the anglo-saxon groups putting forward this idea (which are discussed in Chapter 4), is confirmation of the view that the spread of non-market socialist ideas does not depend exclusively on the efforts of one or other particular socialist sect but is generated by capitalism itself.